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AUTHOR Gifford, Ida: Summerell, Sally
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ABSTRACT

A reading project for educationally disadvantaged elementary students in an impoverished rural area in northeastern New York State has been carried out successfully over a six-year period. The project began with the establishment of a resource center with special linguistic and perceptual instructional materials and progressed to a phase that involved grouping of students in classes not exceeding a 20:1 pupil/teacher ratio, training of teachers in remedial techniques, intensive parent involvement, improved communication between parents and teachers, and use of the school psychologist and reading teacher as an interdisciplinary team that functioned as curriculum planners and consultants to teachers. In subsequent phases of the project, individualized programs were developed for children with learning deficits, and parent workshops, diary and newsletter writing projects for children, and parties and game nights for parents and children were established. The project gave special emphasis to the development of effective motivational techniques, to direct instruction procedures for small group teaching, to perceptual training, and to parent involvement. Several evaluations have been conducted during the various phases of the project, and positive results have been noted in students' emotional and intellectual development. (GT)

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Interdisciplinary Approach to Failure Prevention

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Ida Gifford
Sally Summerell

According to Eli Bower,[4] at least 10 million young people under 25 are crippled in their ability to learn, to relate to others, to see the real world as it is or to handle their impulses adequately. The education of those young people presents a serious and continuing challenge to all public schools. A report prepared in 1972 by the USD-HEW indicates that the incidence of such youngsters runs as high as 12% in the average classroom in the United States. These are children who fall outside the range of individual differences found in a regular classroom. This group includes those from culturally disadvantaged homes as well as those with physical, perceptual or emotional handicaps. Such children are ill prepared to meet the challenges of a regular school program. Off to a poor start, their problems do not resolve themselves. Without adequate identification and planning, their behavior and all too frequent academic failure leads to alienation from the group, to emotional and social problems and eventually to dropping out of school.

Once out of school, they are ill prepared for any but the most menial job. They are usually the last to be hired and the first fired. Too often, they swell the ranks of the unemployed and the welfare rolls. Hence their cultural deprivation is perpetuated from one generation to the next. Yet these children represent a valuable resource to our country - a resource that will be lost if schools do not help them utilize their true learning potential. They deserve an adequate education that will prepare them to cope with the changing conditions in our society. This does not imply a soft approach, a lowering of standards. Their deficits create a need for transitional techniques to bring them into the academic mainstream.

The emphasis on compensatory education, begun in the '60's has been reinforced in the '70's by legislation mandating educational services to exceptional children. Educators have been compelled to evaluate and expand services to such children at a time when funds are scarce and services in other areas are being limited.

Beekmantown Central School is no exception. Located in a conservative and impoverished rural area of Northeastern New York State, its student body includes an unusually large percentage of culturally deprived, in addition to a normal incidence of children otherwise handicapped. Cultural deprivation is often considered an urban inner city problem. Yet children so handicapped may be found in an economically depressed area. They are characterized by lack of exposure to books and to formal language, inadequate motivation to pursue a long term career, antagonism to school and teachers, poor health, improper diet, noisy t.v. ridden homes. As noted above, these children come to school ill prepared to do the work expected, nor do they receive the parental support which could help them overcome their deficits.

A Head Start report in Gainesville, Florida has indicated that only 1% of the children whose parents were involved in a home based education program needed remedial services at fifth grade level while 30% of a control group needed such help.[9]

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Research has shown that parents are primary models for children's behavior. If parents are actively involved and concerned with educational matters so will their children be concerned and involved. Because of the influence of parents on their children's education, the school bears a responsibility for helping parents be the best possible models.

Families in the Beekmantown Central School District are isolated and scattered. Nearly all of the children are bussed in. Parents of the culturally deprived children in particular have had little contact with the school and have tended to stay away from conferences about their children's work. Many have no telephones, so cannot be reached at all.

For many years, Beekmantown attempted to cope with its exceptional youngsters by placing them in regular classes and offering traditional remedial support services. Those who were found to be mentally retarded were placed in special education classes which were conducted in compliance with NYSED mandates (class size limited to 15, certified special education teacher, I.Q. range educable 50-75, trainable below 50).

The school psychologist who had joined the staff in 1960 functioned in time honored fashion as tester-clinican and as gate keeper for special classes. Working in comparative isolation, she accepted teacher referrals, gave tests, and wrote innumerable reports which all too frequently provided confirmation rather than insight into learning problems. These reports often dashed the hopes of teachers who mistakenly considered academically retarded children as candidates for EMR classes.

When this option was removed by the psychological test results, too little of a constructive nature was offered in its place. This was a source of frustration to teachers, but no less so to the psychologist who felt painfully inadequate.

The reading teacher worked with students on a referral basis, outside the classroom. Emphasis was placed on correcting reading failures rather than preventing them. Working with small groups of children outside the classroom often resulted in a lack of communication. Children contended with two separate programs due to a lack of cooperation between the reading teacher and classroom teacher. Likewise there was a division and shift in responsibility as well as accountability for reading instruction from the classroom teacher to the reading teacher despite research evidence that supported the importance of the classroom teacher in successful reading programs.

Palmatier[13] suggested that the reading teacher's prime responsibility should be assisting the classroom teacher rather than serving as a referral teacher. While this was ideal in theory it presented problems that needed to be solved before the reading teacher could pursue this avenue of service.

Continued frustration along with burgeoning problems pointed the need for a fresh approach. Both psychologist and reading teacher were aware that the overall communication network was very weak in the district. Communications were poor between teachers and psychologist, between parents and teachers. All lacked understanding of each others roles. The lack of funds as well as a conservative traditional educational philosophy tended to mitigate against change.

The first ray of light was provided by an announcement of a New York State Education Department Mini Project Program. By this program, small grants are awarded on a competitive basis to school personnel desiring to implement innovative educational projects.

This provided the impetus for the psychologist and reading teacher to break away from their traditional roles and , working as a team, apply for money to begin on a small scale an innovative approach to educating the exceptional children for whom they were responsible.

The project was entitled, "Remediation of Language Deficits in Culturally Disadvantaged Children." The focus was on increasing academic competencies in first and second grade children through development of skills in various auditory and visual areas. The plan was to set up a resource center in the remedial reading room with special linguistic and perceptual materials to be used by the children. An award of $1300 brought it to fruition. The money was used to purchase the needed materials.

A group of thirty first and second graders of low average intelligence were selected by means of group testing with Slingerland Screening Test for identifying children with specific learning disabilities. Their auditory and visual weaknesses pinpointed, these children were scheduled into the resource room which was manned by volunteer parents and college students under the reading teacher's supervision. At the end of the year, post testing using the Slingerland as well as the Stanford Achievement Test produced gratifying results. (See Evidence of Effectiveness)

However, it was realized that, to produce lasting changes and to achieve the basic goals of improved communication and failure prevention, classroom teachers would have to be involved. School faculties generally consist of three types of teachers: early adaptor, mid-adaptor and late adaptor, each having their own identifiable characteristics. Early adaptors usually are characterized by youth, recent training, less experience, lack of tenure flexible attitudes and a willingness to risk change when supported by reliable research. Mid-adaptors, though older, more experienced and tenured, were responsive to change only when its benefits were both observed and verbalized by their peers. Late adaptors, while experienced, tenured and nearing retirement, were threatened by both the change and the change agents. To produce lasting change, identification of early and mid-adaptors was a prime requisite.

As a follow-up to the '72-'73 mini-project, the reading teacher with full support of the administration began to work with a pre-first grade teacher who had shown particular interest in the project. This early adaptor had been identified and assigned to assist the team in moving toward the basic goals. Her students were twenty children who had completed Kindergarten, but who appeared to lack academic skills and/or maturity for a regular first grade curriculum. Wth the guidance and support of the team, learning centers were set up in her classroom. Perceptual programs, direct instruction methods and behavior modification techniques were planned. Children were tested and prescriptions written. Reading groups were formed the first week of school. The reading teacher worked with the lowest of the groups for one half hour daily while the pre-first teacher taught the others. A home-based reading effort was the initial step involving parents. Letters were sent out in early September explaining the reading program to the parents. They were asked to enter into a contract that stated, "I am willing to listen to my child read his/her take-home papers for five minutes a day."

A point system was established which enabled students to earn paper back books for mini libraries. Motivation from this project resulted in books being read by entire families.

This group progressed well. (See Evidence of Effectiveness) A firm foundation had been laid for preventing failure and mid-adaptors appeared on the horizon. Additional primary teachers now expressed a desire to become involved, and administration convinced of the progress made by this pre-first group, planned for expansion of the program. Recognizing the need for materials and the time involved in comprehensive planning, the reading teacher proposed that local funds, set aside by the Board of Education for curriculum develpment, be used for the in-service training of teachers and the purchase of special materials.

In-service sessions with interested teachers from K-5 were scheduled during the summer of 1973. The development of a sound educational philosophy was a basic objective and proved to be a unifying influence. Teachers were exposed to processes of facilitating human relationships, in both individuals and groups. They were provided with reality therapy techniques for guiding children so they could face reality and provide for their needs without infringing upon the rights of others. Reality therapy enabled teachers to learn strategies for modifying children's behavior, to develop confidence in their ability to understand children and to use new approaches in gaining cooperation.

Teachers involved were open and willing to admit that negative teacher attitudes had affected student achievement and that new techniques in developing positive teacher attitudes were necessary if change that resulted in academic improvement was to be effective. They agreed on the following principles:

> Three basic principles are essential for student achievement - perceiving, behaving and believeing. As the child perceives in himself through the eyes of others, as he believes in himself on the basis of past success or failure, he will behave accordingly in the classroom.

Most of the teachers were willing to commit themselves to the above principle. By the end of the sessions, five of the teachers had expressed a desire to utilize their newly acquired insights in working exclusively with the exceptional children. Accordingly in Spetember they were assigned groups of no more than twenty children per class from grades pre-first through fourth.

Expansion of the program changed the role of reading teacher and psychologist to that of curriculum planners/consultants. They worked with the teachers to identify and to plan effective ways of dealing with each child's problem. With this support and their in-service training teachers found themselves able to handle most of the remedial as well as the disciplinary problems in their classes. Only a few of the most severely handicapped children were referred to the specialists for further help.

The program was obviously gaining momentum. The need for intervention at a still earlier point had long been apparent to team members. They had long recognized that many children came to school so ill prepared that they began dropping out from the day they entered kindergarten. As always money for materials was a problem, so the announcement of yet another mini project competition sent the team back to writing again.

The proposal entitled "Conceptual and Perceptual Training Basic to Success in Reading" was accepted and was funded in the amount of $3,000. This was spent on instructional materials, including Encyclopedia Britannica Pre-reading Skills kit. All kindergarten children in the district were screened using the Anton Brenner Test of school readiness. From the total group eight youngsters were selected who had scored in the low to low average range. Their deficit areas were ping-pointed by means of the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts and PIAT reading recognition test. Individualized programs were set up by their teachers in consultation with the team.

This project was carried out during the 1974-1975 school year, and post tests administered in the spring of 1975 produced encouraging results. (See Evidence of Effectiveness)

By 1975, three years after the inital mini-project, the program had expanded to include one class of twenty students at each level - pre-first through fourth grade. Although it was going well, the need for closer involvement with parents was evident to all concerned. Too many of the parents continued to be reluctant for one reason or another about participation in school activities. The time seemed ripe for a really concerted effort to bring them into the educational network.

Another mini project announcement inspired yet another writing effort by the team. This project, entitled "Better Reading, Better Writing Through Parent Participation" was funded in the amount of $2,244.00 for the '76-'77 school year. This provided enough money for a number of projects designed to bring parents into the school scene, to inform them about what their children were doing and to enlist their aid in reinforcing the schools' efforts. Some of these were the following:

-Parent workshops which focused on ways to help children at home through games and play activities.

-A diary writing project. Each child whose parents participated in workshops was given a diary. This was actually an 8x10 ringbinder notebook in which he could record the events of his/her days, hopefully with parent help. Children too young to write were encouraged to draw pictures of their activities. Each week all were asked to bring the books into school to show teachers their work. All efforts were lavishly rewarded with verbal praise, stickers etc. and diary pages were prominently displayed on a bulletin board in the hall. At the end of the year, certificates were awarded to all participants and special prizes given to outstanding diary writers.

-A school newsletter written by students with parent and teacher support. All children were encouraged to contribute something. Pictures were solicitied from those unable to write. To stimulate further interest a newsletter naming contest was conducted among the students with a prize awarded to the winner. Three issues of the Beekmantown Eaglet News were published in the course of the '76-'77 school year. Yhese were well received and avidly read.

-Parties and game nights for parents and children. Parents were encouraged to bring the whole family to participate with children and teachers in games, to have coffee and socialize with teachers in a relaxed atmosphere at the end of the evening.

The results of the foregoing were gratifying indeed. (See Evidence of Effectiveness) Furthermore, parents who had never before visited the school now began doing so and with ever increasing enthusiasm. More important, they began showing pride and interest in their children's work. As a follow up to the mini-project, workshops and parties have been continued, though lack of funds forced discontinuation of diary and newsletter projects.

MAJOR AREAS OF EMPHASIS

Basic to the success of our project has been a departure from traditional curricula and classroom management techniques and the adoption of innovative approaches.

Special emphasis has been placed on changes in the following four areas:

I. Motivational Techniques

Motivation has long been a serious problem in the education of disadvantaged children. As stated earlier in this paper these children frequently start school ill prepared academically or socially to meet classroom expectations. Their failures lead to frustration, this in turn, often produces behaviors which further hinder learning. A positive and highly consistent approach has been found to work well with the children in our program. Consistency is important not only within a given classroom, but as a child progresses from one grade level to the next. In that way he knows at all times exactly what will be expected from him in school. Behavior problems are minimized and the child's energies can be focussed upon learning. If the parents can be persuaded to adapt a similar approach at home, the child's situation is further enhanced. Motivational techniques have therefore been heavily stressed in both parent and teacher workshops. Training in motivational techniques has been carried out, workshop participants have been encouraged to be fair, consistent and reasonable with children. Two specific approaches have been presented-William Glasser's Reality Therapy, as it relates to adult imposed discipline and Alyvn Freed's Transactional Analysis approach for improved inter-personal relationships.

Glasser's discipline techniques have given parent/teachers "handles" for coping with the moment-by-moment discipline problems needing quick resolution. The format allows for consistency, fairness and reasonableness on the part of the parent and teacher as well as for a measure of predictable reaction on the part of the child. The process involves having the adult pose four questions: 1) Are you helping? 2) What are you doing? 3) What is something else you could do that is better? 4) When are you going to do it? The questions enable the child to identify and own the problem, to accept responsibility for correcting the situation and to make a commitment for getting it done. At the same time, the adult has a format at his fingertips for dealing with dilemma.

The second approach taken from Alvyn Freed's Transactional Analysis techniques makes use of the "warm fuzzy" and "cold prickly" concept. This has been used to improve child-to-child relationships as well as interaction of children with parents and/or teachers. A "warm fuzzy" can be defined as something nice that you do or say that makes others feel good about themselves. This can be a verbal compliment or it can be an action, such as a smile, a wink, or a pat on the back. Conversely a "cold prickly" is a negative remark or deed which produces bad feelings in others. The adults in our program have learned to help children give "warm'

fuzzies" to one another by first making a kind remark to a child, then asking him how it made him feel. The child usually says that it made him feel good. He is then asked to practice giving "warm fuzzies" to other children. "Cold pricklies" are defined and discussed, but discouraged. The result has been a marked improvement in classroom atmosphere as well as in homes where the technique is used. The self concepts of the children have benefitted as well.

II. Direct Instruction

In the educational management of disadvantaged children, we have found that structure and consistency in teaching techniques is of equal importance to consistency in motivational techniques. Direct instruction methods have enabled teachers to maintain a marked degree of consistency in teaching procedures. This structure which is consistent from teacher-to-teacher is predictable as far as pupil expectation is concerned. Pupils understand the structure of language used from teacher-to-teacher which results in improved pupil-teacher communication. Time is not lost in understanding what is expected from teacher-to-teacher and more time can be devoted to learning.

Direct instruction recognizes that eliciting overt responses is an effective way of teaching skills and concepts. Structured teaching procedures insist on active pupil responding in an effort to maximize memory, accuracy and comprehension. At the same time the rapid rate of responding by the pupil lends itself to maintaining attention and managing behavior.

An analysis of concepts provides the framework for developing teaching formats in an orderly fashion. The logical dependence of some concepts upon others implies order in teaching based upon preskills and component skills.

Teachers have been trained in direct instruction procedures for small group teaching. Specific skills emphasied have been use of hand signals, prompts, reinforcers as well as correction procedures and pacing of instruction. The teacher's posture of model-lead-test have been defined in teaching tasks so that they know exactly what they are expected to do or say and when to do or say it. Teachers have been challenged to practice these skills so that they have become proficient in using them. Direct instruction is a new approach to teaching that requires practice and much repetition-it is not doing "what comes naturally."

III. Perceptual Training

The importance of perceptual and motor development in the total learning process cannot be over emphasized. Learning to manipulate his body in relation to objects, learning to manipulate the objects themselves in a predictable fashion enable the child to adopt and respond to the demands of situations in which he will later find himself. An enormous amount of random experimentation is neccessary. A child must try out all possible muscular responses of which his body is capable to find out what his body can do and how it relates spatially to his physical environment. Only then can he develop the neurological patterns which enable him to control his motor responses in carrying out such activities as writing, copying, etc. In the normal course of development, gross motor skill involving the total musulature pre-

cede independent movements of smaller muscle groups.

Educators have tended to assume that when a child enters school, certain abilities and degrees of skill in perceptual and motor activities have been acquired. Since the school is designed for the so-called normal child, this base logically assumes the abilities that the average child displays on entering school. Yet these do not represent the starting point of learning for the child, but they are the culmination of a rapid period of development throughout the preschool years. When conditions are not normal, as when the environment is inadequate or when physical or emotional handicaps exist, these assumed learnings will not take place. The child will enter school with a lesser degree of skill in one or more areas than the curriculum assumes, to the detriment of his future progress.

Project children have frequently been found to be deficient in both gross and fine motor skills. Therefore emphasis has been placed on activities promoting development in these areas.

Such activities have been incorporated into the classroom and physical education curricula as well as playground pursuits. Parents have been encouraged to help at home. Many games, handicrafts, and other recreational projects lend themselves well to enhancing development of fine motor skills in particular.

Some of the school activities which have proven helpful are:

1. Gross motor development
   - Walking board
   - Balance board
   - Stepping stones
   - Angels in the snow
   - Trampoline
   - Ball games of all types
   - Jumping
   - Skipping
   - Hula hooping
   - Square dancing
   - Body parts identification

2. Fine motor development
   - Chalk board activities
   - Finger painting and other art projects of all types
   - Tracing
   - Sand table activities
   - Copying

IV. Parent Involvement

Innumerable surveys have shown that parents have a greater influence on a child's life than anyone else. In the prededing sections of this paper, we have attempted to show some of the ways in which we have attempted not only to inform parents as to what is being done for their children in school, but to gain their active support and involvement in the educational process. This will continue to be a major thrust of the project. Workshops as well as family parties, special programs prepared by the children and described above have all proven effective in bringing parents into the schools. Once the ice was broken and a positive relationship with the parents was established, it has proven to be a relatively simple matter to maintain and strengthen this relationship.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

I. Academic Effects

In 1973 an experimental group of thirteen students was selected from a project first grade. These were matched as to age, sex, socio-economic level and intelligence with a like number of students in a regular first grade. A matched pairs t-test was completed to ascertain whether significant differences existed between the two groups on the SAT Word Reading scores. A significant difference of approximately six months was obtained in favor othe control group.

In April 1975, the groups were again compared to ascertain their word recognition abilities. There was no significant difference in mean Word Reading grade scores.

II. Mini Project Evaluations

Mini-Project I - Spring 1972

Remediation of Language Deficits in Culturally Disadvantaged Children.

Pre and post testing instrument: Slingerland Test for Identifying Children with Specific Language Disabilities.

There are no norms for this test and the author suggests that each school develop its own. In Beekmantown it was used for this to be done. The tables below present average percentages of items completed correctly in each area in the pre and post tests.

	Pre-test March 1972	Post test June 1972	Percent Gain
Visual Memory (sub test 3&4)	61%	82%	21%
Visual Discrimination (sub test 3&4)	82%	88%	6%
Visual Motor Coordination (sub tests)	77%	85%	8%
Auditory Memory (subtest 6)			
Letters	57%	65%	8%
Numbers	68%	83%	15%
Spelling	37%	59%	22%
Auditory Discrimination (sub test 7)	28%	59%	31%
SD	19.94	12.55	
X	58.57	79.42	
t	4.52	79.42	
df.	6		
signf.	.01		

Mini-Project II - September 1973-June 1974
Conceptual and Perceptual Training Basic to Success in Reading

Pre and Post testing instruments:

1. Boehm Test of Basic Concepts
   Purpose: to measure spatial vocabulary concepts, ability to attend to a task in a group situation for 20 minutes.
2. Peabody Individual Achievement Test - Reading Recognition Subtest
   Purpose: for recognition of shapes and patterns of letter configuration, comprehension and retention of letter sounds.

	Pre test January 1975	Post test May 1975
Boehm Group Average	50th percentile	75th percentile
PIAT Group Average	36th percentile	58th percentile

Mini-Project III - September 1975-June 1976
Better Reading and Better Writing Through Parent Participation

Pre and Post testing instrument:
Gates McGinitie Reading Test

	Pre test rating Oct. '76	Post test rating May '77
Reading Comp.	Average for grade level group	4 months ahead of grade level group
Reading Vocabulary	Average for grade level group	3 months ahead of grade level group

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III. Emotional Effects

In April 1975, Cassell Child Behavior Adjustment Scale Scores were obtained for 13 project children and 13 control children who had been matched as to age, sex, intelligence, socio-economic level and grade level. Comparison of total adjustment scores showed that the Project group had significantly fewer indications of emotional maladjustment than did the controls, according to teacher ratings.

IV. Intellectual Effects

A. In 1973, mean I.Q. scores were obtained on two groups of 13 children each selected from a project first grade and a regular first grade who had been matched as to age, sex, and socio-economic background. No significant difference between the two groups was found. In April 1975, Mental Maturity Scores obtained on these groups from Human Figure Drawings scored according to Koppitz's scale were compared. At that time there was found to be a significant difference in favor of the project children.

B. Human Figure Drawings were obtained in September 1974 and in June 1975 from each of 80 Kindergarten children selected for Mini Project II. These were scored according to a 10 point evaluation scale developed by Anton Brenner. Between September and May, the total group had gained an average of 31 scale points - this represents an average of 32 per cent.

V. Follow-up Study

In May 1978, mean grade equivalent scores in Reading Comprehension and Math Computation were obtained on fifth grade students who were the first group to have passed through all grade levels of the project, pre-first through fourth. These were compared with similar mean scores of all fifth graders in the Beekmantown Central School District with the following results:

	Mean Grade Equivalent Scores	
	Reading Comprehension	Math Computation
Fifth Grade Project Students	5.6	7.0
All Fifth Grade Students	5.6	7.0

(Testing Instrument: California Achievement Test)

SUMMARY

A most successful project for educationally disadvantaged students has been carried out at Beekmantown Central School over a six year period. The existing teaching and pupil personnel staff have been used; except for three New York State mini-grants, the project has been funded within the local curriculum budget.

Basic to the project have been:

-Grouping of students in classes not exceeding 20:1 pupil-teacher ratio.

-Training of teachers in remedial techniques.

-Intensive parent involvement.

-Improved communication among parent teachers, pupil placement.

-Use of an interdisciplinary team of psychologist and reading teacher as educational consultants to both teachers and parents rather than in their traditional roles.

The project has become an integral part of the Beekmantown Elementary School Program and indefinite continuation is anticipated.

CHRONOLOGY

*1972 (Spring)	"Remediation of Language Deficits in Culturally Disadvantaged Children"
1972-1973	In-Service-"Direct Instruction and Learning Disabilities"
1973 (Summer)	"In-Service-"Direct Instruction in Reading, Language and Math"
*1974-1975	"Conceptual and Perceptual Training Basic to Success in Reading"
1974-1976	In-Service-"Direct Instruction and Management of Learning Centers"
*1976-1977	"Better Reading-Better Writing Through Parent Participation"
1977-1978	In-Service-"Coordinating the Parent/Teacher Learning Process"

*Mini-Projects

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